

Submission by Society for Threatened Peoples

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Romania

1. According to the census of 2011, Romania has around 19 million inhabitants. With 89,5% the Romanians are by far the biggest population group of the country. The second biggest are the Hungarians with 6.6%, the third the Roma with 2.5%. The size of the German population (Transylvanian Saxons and Danube Swabians), a big group until the mid-20th century, sank to 0.3%. Besides those groups there are a number of other, smaller minorities living in Romania: Ukrainians (0.3%), Russian-Lipovans (0.2%), Turks (0.2%), Tatars (0.1%), Serbs (0.1%), Slovaks (0.1%) and Czechs (below 0.1%).

General Situation of Roma in Romania

2. According to official statistics Romania is home to 535,250 Roma. Unofficial estimates speak of 2 to 3 million. This enormous difference can be explained by the endemic discrimination and stigmatization of the Roma people: many Roma people deny their ethnic heritage because they fear increased discrimination. It took until the end of the 1980s to finally recognize the Roma as national minority together with the Hungarians, the Germans, the Serbs and the Ukrainians. But the new status did not bring much improvement to their situation: the living standard of Roma people is a lot lower than the living standard of the majority population. Institutional and social discrimination is part of their everyday life, their housing and employment situation is very bad, they are still victims of verbal and physical violence and their access to education and health care is severely restricted. Women and children are exceptionally affected by the discrimination. The amount of illiterates, school drop outs and those who have never visited a school is higher among women. This is due to the fact that girls do not only face the same obstacles in the education system as boys do but because they also suffer from prejudices and traditional ideas among their communities.
3. Although the government took actions against the exclusion and discrimination of Roma people the implementation failed. Therefore, exclusion and discrimination in Romanian schools is still widely experienced by Roma children. Students may be excluded from classes due to their ethnicity or may be put in schools for slow learners. The STP is worried about the living conditions of the Roma people in Romania. The members of the Roma are still victims of negative ethnic stereotypes and discrimination. The vast majority of the Roma live in poverty on the periphery of the cities and villages. The hygienic conditions, the severe financial situation, the high unemployment, delinquency and prostitution lead to marginalization of the minority of the Roma people. In addition, they suffer from broad-brush, deeply rooted and bias prejudices and stereotypes by the majority population who see the Roma as communities made of thieves, cheaters, beggars and criminals who damage the image

of Romania in foreign countries. The government has to be stauncher in the support of the Roma people. It has to emphasize and promote the implementation of European jurisdiction against discrimination.

Roma portrayed as tarnishing the image of the state

4. It is often said, that Roma are especially difficult to integrate into society. They are described as a criminal and parasitic category; as a demographic threat. In Romania, Roma are considered simply as people who damage the image of the country. Discriminatory statements as well as racially motivated violence against “gypsies” have repeatedly been the cause for conflicts. The Romanian President Trajan Băsescu shocked the public in 2003, when he was still the mayor of Bucharest, when he proposed to set up sites for the Roma on the outskirts of the capital and to remove them from the city. In 2007, when he was already president, he berated a journalist as a “stinking gypsy”.
5. In 2009, a campaign in Romania demanded to only refer to Roma as “Gypsies”. Supposedly, the image of the state would otherwise be impaired. The Bucharest newspaper Jurnalul National published its proposal noting that foreign countries oftentimes confuse Romania with Roma. The Romanian nationalists, who have been fighting the term 'Roma' for 20 years, established the word Rroma with two “Rr”. In the newest edition of the Romanian defining dictionary, which was published under the sponsorship of the Romanian Academy in 2011, the pejorative term for Jews, “Jidan” (which is considered a racial insult) is used next to the definition of “gypsy” as “a person with ugly habits”.
6. The mayor of the northern Romanian industrial city Baia Mare, Cătălin Cherecheș, decided in the Summer of 2011 to build a 1,80 metre high wall around Roma settlements as a reaction to prior complaints made by immediate neighbours, who felt harassed by the garbage, the screaming children and the loud music of the people living there. Cherecheș was also jointly responsible for the forced relocation of dozens of Roma families from informal settlements on the outskirts of Baia Mare (Craica, Pirita und Garii) on 1 June 2012. They were resettled to the site and into the office buildings of a former copper factory. In the rooms where the families were accommodated, there were shelves filled with chemicals. Several dozen adults and children complained of nausea, dizziness and headaches. Two adults and 22 children had to be taken to the hospital on the first night. The STP is appalled by the authorities' indifference towards these problems. Supposedly, Cherecheș even joked that the Roma were falling ill from the 'cleanliness' of the factory.
7. As early as May 2012, 70 Roma families were resettled to the factory grounds, after about 300 families were distributed eviction notices in April. The residents were requested to leave the settlement within the next 30 days and demolish their own homes. Those who didn't have identity documents registered in Baia Mare were resettled in the communities where they are registered. Others were pressured to sign a contract, stating that they would move to the factory building for three years. Apparently the decisions affecting the families had been made by self proclaimed Roma representatives, who have been informed by the local authorities and presented the families a fait accompli. There has been no direct communication between the

authorities and the concerned Roma. In May, the “Roma leaders” informed them that the settlement will be demolished and that they had the choice to either move into the factory offices or that they’d get a plot of land assigned by the authorities where they could rebuild their house. The self proclaimed community leaders threatened homelessness if the families didn’t sign the contract. There was no adequate information about the possible places for relocation or the conditions of their resettlement.

8. The offices of the industrial enterprise CUPROM were never approved for use as living quarters and the building does not meet the basic requirements (local and international standards) for adequate housing. There are four toilets and two small rooms without kitchen facilities (no washing and cooking facilities) per 20 families. In addition to inadequate sanitation, overcrowding and lack of equipment, the building does not meet the fire safety provisions. Aside from the inhumane conditions in the factory building, the relocation does not seem to be a permanent solution, as the site has been provided by a private company for the duration of three years.

The situation of the Roma is still unsatisfying

9. In 2001 a federal state authority for the Roma (*Agentia Nationala pentru romi*) was established. In August 2010 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed its concern that members of the Roma are still victims of racial stereotyping and discrimination regarding their access to education, housing, health care and work. In 2010, the NGOs *Decade Watch* and *Agenția de Dezvoltare Comunitară Împreună* complained that Romania was lacking political will to implement previous commitments regarding the situation of the Roma. The implementation of the Roma strategy has insofar been inadequate, as the financing of measures at the regional level is not assured.
10. In April 2011, the Romanian government developed a strategy to improve the situation of the Roma. This was meant as a preventive measure against the proliferation of the social impoverishment process of the minority and to keep the negative reports about the Roma’s alarming situation in the foreign press at bay. Until now, this strategy has not shown any significant results. There is a strong need for more support by the state via educational programs, better health care and public housing projects. A solution is needed for those who are excluded because of missing identification papers and birth certificates. More programs and measures by the government are needed to enhance the societal recognition of the Roma as minority of Romania. The majority has to be informed and educated of and about the culture and history of the Roma people. Ultimately, the goal is to sensitize the society in regards to the obstacles and problems of the Roma people and to reshape the currently very poor image of the Roma people. This can be achieved e.g. via (school) education, the media or public events.